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SPEECH

OF

W. C. EDWARDS, Esq., Ex-M.P.,

— ON —

The Manitoba School Question.

Taken from Hansard, March 19th, 1896.

In the discussion of the matter before the House, we have listened to many long and able speeches. Of the hon. gentleman who has just taken his seat (Mr. Costigan) I will say this, that I thoroughly believe in the sentiments he expressed in his closing remarks. I believe he is a man of broad gauge. I have always respected him, and I hope I always shall respect him. Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman who opened this debate, the Secretary of State, also made his closing speech to-day, and what did we expect on such an occasion? We expected some summary of the debate, some argument, and some broad discussion of the question. But after eulogizing the hon. member for Bothwell (Mr. Mills) he devoted himself to the leader of the Opposition, and what did he say? He said that his speech was eloquent, and he very properly congratulated him on the eloquence of his great speech; but he said at the same time that it was nothing more or less than a bundle of contradictions from beginning to end. Did he take up that speech, and show wherein the leader of the Opposition was chargeable with one single contradiction? No, sir, not at all. He devoted himself to an exultation of his own acts. He also greatly deplored the discord which this debate would create in this country as the result of turning nationalities and creeds against each other. Was there ever a speech delivered in this House more calculated to turn class and creed against each other than the speech of the hon. gentleman? He is the great man. According to his own statement, he made Nova Scotia; after he made Nova Scotia, he created the Dominion; he is now engaged in the unification of the Empire, and when he has completed that work, he is going to tackle the universe. The hon. gentleman claims that in a lecture he delivered as a youth he laid the foundations of confederation. I have always understood that the Hon. Joseph Howe and Mr. Alexander Galt were the first men who introduced that question, they being followed by Hon. George Brown, and to Mr. Brown more than to any other man confederation is due. I have stated that the speech of the Secretary of

State was calculated more than any speech to which I have ever listened to turn creed against creed and nationality against nationality. He has done a great wrong to the country in that regard. But there is a party in this House to whom the country owes a gratitude for the manly position they have taken. I refer to the French Liberals of the Province of Quebec. But for them we might have a war of races; owing to their noble conduct, however, they have averted such a disaster. What did the hon. Secretary of State do? He took position after position to show how the Liberal party had been unjust from confederation forwards to the Roman Catholic minority. Is the hon. gentleman aware that there is a Conservative party in Ontario? What has been the conduct of that party for many years past? Is that not the party which has attempted to wreck the constitution, to destroy separate schools in that province, to put down the French language. Three successive elections have been run on those lines in Ontario, and the chief of the party who ran the elections in the interest of the Conservatives has received his reward, and is now Chief Justice of the province. From whom has he received his reward? From the very men who are now claiming that they are defending the rights of the Catholic minority. So far as the rights of the Catholic minority are concerned, their defence is more largely to be credited to the Liberal party than to any other party in the country. Hon. gentlemen opposite have asserted that the leader of the Opposition was making a great bid for power. The Minister of Finance said the other day that my hon. friend was playing a bold game; he even referred to cards up his sleeves, but the hon. Minister knows more about matters of that kind than I do. The Conservative party to-day, driven into a corner, are making a desperate bid for the entire Roman Catholic vote of the Dominion. But they are not going to obtain it, for the Roman Catholics well know that the present Government have made this school question a political one throughout. They have simply deceived the Roman Catholics, and they in turn

do not trust the Government. The Liberal party are a party that will not do more for Roman Catholics than for Protestants, but will mete out equal-handed justice to all. As regards the question before the House, I am not afraid, as I have never been afraid, to state my own views and position upon it. My views no doubt differ to a considerable extent from those held by some hon. gentlemen who will vote as I will vote upon this question. From the speech delivered by the Minister of Finance a few days ago, it was evident that a great change had come over the position of certain parties in this country. I was highly amused to hear a Conservative argue exactly on the same lines so far as the rights of the minorities are concerned as we in Ontario have been arguing for many years past. As I understand the question, separate schools are guaranteed to the province of Ontario under confederation; dissentient schools in Quebec are in exactly the same position. I have always understood that the separate school system originated at the instance of the Protestants of Quebec. I know this from an acquaintance with dissentient schools in Quebec, that the Protestants of that province will not be willing to surrender them; and I further believe that the Roman Catholics in that province have done even handed justice to the Protestants and will continue to do so. So far as Ontario is concerned, I believe the same conditions will prevail, and to my mind it is not a question as to whether we like separate schools or not, but the question is what has been guaranteed under the constitution to the minorities in those two provinces in that respect. Those conditions we are bound to maintain. So far as I am concerned public schools would satisfy me, and I want nothing more; but I am not disposed to ask other men to take my medicine. As I understand it, the only difference between Protestant and Catholic on this question is one of degree. In Quebec, the Protestants want separate schools, and in Ontario the Catholics want separate schools. It is true the Protestants are satisfied with a less degree of religion in their schools, I believe, than the Roman Catholics are, and it is only in this respect that they differ.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my views on this question are as follows: In so far as the maritime provinces are concerned, I do not think that the Dominion Government would have any right at all to interfere. These provinces had their legislatures before confederation, and no change was made at that time. I believe, that in so far as these provinces are concerned, it is within their own jurisdiction to continue their school affairs as they please. In so far as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec are concerned, we have the separate schools as a fixture, and I

do not believe that they will, or can be changed. Now, then, in so far as Manitoba is concerned, and in so far as any provinces that may in the future come into confederation are concerned, I believe that the same rights should be extended to these new provinces as exist in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. In so far as the minority in the province of Manitoba are concerned, I am perfectly willing that they should have well regulated separate schools. I believe that a grievance exists, and I believe that that grievance should be remedied. But, Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to vote for a law that coerces Manitoba. I believe that that question can be settled in a far quicker way than by a resort to such means. I believe in the proposition of the hon. leader of the Opposition.

An hon. member. Of course you do.

Some hon. gentleman says "of course you do." Well, whether my leader propounded that doctrine or not, I would certainly believe in it. I have said, Sir, that a grievance exists, and that that grievance should be remedied. But, Mr. Speaker, I further believe that the Government have been playing with this question for the last six years. I am not a lawyer, and I do not pretend to know anything about constitutional law, but there is one thing which appears very strange indeed to me, and that is, that this very Government which allowed the Manitoba School Act to become law, asks us to-day to wipe out that Act by legislation in this House. Why did they ever allow the Act to go into force when they could exercise the veto power? So far as I am concerned, their course seems to me to be devoid of reason and common sense. It seems to me perfectly absurd, that this Government which allowed the Act to go into force, and who put themselves under the shadow of the courts of the land, until finally they are driven into a corner on the question, should come and ask this Parliament to restore the school laws of Manitoba which existed before 1890, and which they themselves allowed to be abolished. Although I do not believe in disallowance generally, I do believe that this Act of 1890 should have been disallowed. Strongly as I believe in restoring their rights to the minority of Manitoba, I am not prepared to vote to-day for this Bill, because I believe that a joint commission appointed by this Government and by the Manitoba government would arrive at a solution of the question, and would settle it in a manner far more satisfactory to the country than by making it a political question, as has been done. Mr. Speaker, I will not delay the House any longer. There are several other gentlemen who wish to speak. I have expressed my views upon the subject and I have nothing more to say.

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